

# Advice on Riding on beaches in Scotland

Scotland boasts many fantastic beaches around its long coastline, and along the shores of some of its many lochs. From the pristine white shell-sand beaches of the Western Isles to the gleaming golden sands which fringe Fife and East Lothian, from small sandy coves to tidal estuaries, beaches appeal to most horse riders as much as they do to others keen to enjoy and explore our coastline and loch shores.

This information sheet explains horse riders' and carriage drivers' access rights and responsibilities in relation to beaches in Scotland and offers some ideas for suitable beaches which you can enjoy with your horse.



## **Are horses allowed on beaches in Scotland?**

The legal position regarding access to beaches and all other land and water differs in Scotland to that in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, horse-riders share the same legal access rights as walkers, cyclists and other non-motorised users to most land and inland water, including beaches, the foreshore (i.e. between the upper and lower ordinary spring tides) and loch shores, providing they exercise their rights responsibly. Access rights can be exercised at any time of day or night, for recreational purposes and for crossing over land.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code ([www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com)) explains what everyone's rights and responsibilities are, including exceptions such as growing crops, playing fields, golf greens, the curtilage of buildings or works, and areas where access is prohibited, excluded or restricted under other legislation. The three key principles of the Code are that whether you are keen to enjoy the outdoors with your horse or are responsible for managing land, you must:

- **Take responsibility for your own actions.** You are responsible for acting with care at all times for your own safety and that of others.
- **Respect the interests of other people.**
- **Care for the environment.** Look after the places you visit and enjoy.

### Getting on and off beaches

Although the law is quite clear cut in confirming rights of access on and along beaches and the foreshore, getting onto the beach is not always so straightforward. If the only way to get onto a beach involves risk of damaging fragile sand dunes or saltmarsh, you would not be acting responsibly as you would not be caring for the environment. Accessing a beach across Defence Estate ranges in active service is also specifically excluded from access rights.

There is no reason why you can't use steps or other access designed primarily for walkers, but you need to take particular care to make sure you are respecting the interests of others.

Some people are frightened of horses, and most don't expect to meet a horse using steps.

- Where width is limited, make sure there's no-one else on the steps before you venture forth. If you can't see the opposite end, call out.
- Be prepared to wait. Always give way to people on foot, particularly the young and old.
- Always clear dung off steps or surfaced paths, and from parking areas.



## Taking your horse on a beach

Apart from the sheer fun of riding or driving along a beach, firm sand is fantastic for trotting, cantering and galloping, ideal for building muscle tone, strength and stamina. But you need to be careful: deep, soft or very hard sand can injure horses, especially at speed, and sinking sand or mud is potentially fatal. The quality and nature of sand can change in a stride, especially on estuaries. Holes and streams which may be deeper or softer than they first appear can present hidden hazards to horses. Rocks can be slippery, particularly when covered in seaweed. Glass bottles, cans, metal, nets and rusty spikes are some of the many types of rubbish which may be hidden below the sand. Be aware of the risks, including in the water.

Bear in mind that beaches change with every tide, so never rely on what someone else has told you, or where the hard and soft areas were last time you were there. If you want to ride fast, walk or trot the beach beforehand to check conditions. Take particular care when crossing estuaries, which are notoriously unpredictable.

Tides can come in very quickly, particularly on flat beaches and estuaries. On some beaches it is easy to get cut off. Deep hidden channels may block escape routes. Make sure you have your exit route identified in advance, and check tide times before you set off. Tide timetables are available online (e.g. <http://easytide.ukho.gov.uk/Easytide/easytide>), from the local authority, and often from local shops.

Horses which are not used to beaches may react differently, even those which are normally calm. Some love swimming, others may be frightened by the waves and become over-excited by the wide open space and sea air, particularly in company. Approach the sea calmly and slowly, ideally from an angle rather than head-on to minimise the risk of your horse rearing if it spooks at the waves. If possible, take another more experienced horse with you when visiting a beach for the first time with your horse.

Some beaches are used for kite flying, sand yachting, motorbike racing, parasailing or other sports. Think carefully how your horse might react, and don't take your horse on a beach where there are other people unless you are confident you are in control.

**Remember that whether on a beach or anywhere else, you are responsible for controlling your horse and respecting the interests of other people. It is not up to other people to move out of your way.**

## Beach etiquette

Access rights in Scotland depend on everyone behaving responsibly. Failure to do so risks horse riders and carriage drivers being banned from beaches.

- ✓ Be aware of other people on the beach, take their interests and concerns into account, and be courteous to everyone you meet.
- ✓ Take particular care around children and the elderly. Remember that they may not appreciate the risks of coming too close to an unknown horse.
- ✓ Slow your pace to walk and allow plenty of space when passing other people.
- ✓ If you want to go fast, your horse has never been to a beach before and/or you know it may get excited, choose a beach and/or time which is likely to be quiet, such as early morning or evening.
- ✓ Follow the same rules as dog walkers and remove dung from beaches used by other people. No-one wants to picnic, play or swim amongst horse dung.
- ✓ Follow signs and local guidance aimed at reducing dune or machair erosion, damage to sensitive saltmarsh, or at avoiding disturbance of nesting birds.
- ✓ Keeping a dog under control when you are riding or carriage driving can be challenging at the best of times, particularly when there are distractions such as you might expect to meet on beaches, such as other people and dogs. Only take your dog with you if you are able to keep it under control when there are other dogs, horses and people around. Do not ride accompanied by your dog on busy beaches. Even on quiet beaches, make sure you keep your dog at heel when passing other people.

## Parking

Legal rights of access to land and water do not include motorised vehicles, or parking. Some local authorities and landowners provide car parks at beaches, for which they are entitled to charge. Bear in mind that many beach car parks have height barriers to restrict caravans and HGVs, which may also restrict access with a trailer or horse box.

- ✓ Check what parking is available in advance, including seasonal, time and height restrictions.
- ✓ Make sure you don't obstruct access by others, particularly emergency vehicles.
- ✓ If parking on the beach, check tide times and whether the beach is firm enough to avoid getting stuck!
- ✓ Clear up any dung around your trailer or horsebox so that it does not interfere with others' enjoyment.

## Beach-related access issues

If you have further questions about access to beaches in a particular area, or encounter specific problems with beach access, the first point of call is your local access authority. Most access authorities in Scotland have an access officer who will be able to help you. Alternatively, you might like to try speaking with your local equestrian access group (see [www.bhsscotland.org.uk/equestrian-access-groups.html](http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk/equestrian-access-groups.html) for affiliated groups) or regional BHS access representative.

## Suggested beaches for riding in Scotland

The beaches listed below (under regions in alphabetical order) have been suggested by BHS members as some already enjoyed by riders. The aim is to include these on <http://www.bhsaccess.org.uk/ridemaps/> as from late 2014. This list is by no means exhaustive, and inclusion of any beach does not constitute a recommendation. It is your responsibility to check out suitability for what you want to do, and to follow the advice outlined above.

### **Aberdeenshire**

#### Balmedie

Miles of flat golden sand approximately 8 miles north of Aberdeen, with ample parking, including dedicated parking for trailers and horseboxes, as well as toilet and BBQ facilities. Take care riding through the dunes to access the beach to avoid disturbing wildlife.

### **Ayrshire**

Ayr, Greenan and Irvine beaches are all brilliant for riding, but tend to be very busy when the weather is good over summer, during which time riders are advised to enjoy the beaches early morning or evening. Irvine beach has a massive car park for trailers and lorries.

### **Dumfries and Galloway**

Numerous beaches along the Solway Firth are used regularly by riders, including stretches of firm sand around Powfoot, and at Mersehead, but watch out for patches of soft/sinking sand. Further west, Brighthouse Bay, Auchencairn Bay and Fleet Bay also offer good riding, as do various beaches around the Machars, including Monreith Bay, Garlieston Bay and Luce Sands. There are also glorious sandy beaches either side of the Rhins: Ardwell Bay, New England Bay, Sandhead and Maryport Bays, Drummorie Bay, Port Logan Bay

### **East Lothian**

#### Belhaven Bay/John Muir Country Park, Dunbar.

Wide sandy beach stretching from Belhaven to the north of the River Tyne, fringed by low sand dunes, rich salt marsh and colourful grassland. Fantastic views across the Forth estuary. Email [ranger@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:ranger@eastlothian.gov.uk) to register (free of charge) your car & trailer/horsebox and obtain a free

permit for the car park which includes information on recommended riding routes and access across the saltmarsh to avoid damage to sensitive habitats.

### Gullan Bay

One of the best beaches in East Lothian is at Gullane Bents, where the north west facing Gullane Bay, backed by dunes, sweeps round from Gullane Point to Black Rocks. Those arriving at particularly high tides can be in for a surprise, as the beach can all but totally disappear making progress along it challenging. Gullane Bents is signposted from Gullane's busy Main Street and there is ample parking available.

### Longniddry

Good riding but no parking for boxes or trailers.

### North Berwick Milsey Beach

An expansive sandy beach with splendid views of the Bass Rock and across the Firth of to Fife. Rock pools, walks and boat pond make this popular with families so take particular care riding on this beach.

### North Berwick West Beach

A long stretch of sand with views to the island of Craigleith and the Bass Rock.

### Seton Sands

A wild and undisturbed beach with a mix of both sand and rocks. There is a dog exercise area and the beach provides good walking and horse riding while windsurfers and canoeists often use the sea. Toilets, disabled access to beach, car parking.

Yellowcraig is a natural cove with spectacular views to the 1885 lighthouse on Fidra Island, the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's famous tale Treasure Island. It's a great beach for riding, but is also popular with families because of the adventure play area, nature trail, BBQ facilities (which must be pre-booked with the council) and network of footpaths through the adjoining sheltered woodlands and extensive grassland. Toilets and large car park with designated trailer/lorry parking.

## Fife

### Aberdour Silversands

This delightful tree-lined beach with its seasonal cafe, picnic area, showers and adjoining park is deservedly one of the most popular in Fife. It is only a short walk from the Aberdour station. If you are coming by car, there is a large car park hidden away among the trees some 50 metres back from the beach. Disabled parking is provided right beside the shore.

### Leven Beach

Over 2km sweep of golden sand, perfect for riding, linking on to Lundin Links – great for riders with a partner who'd rather play golf. Remember to keep a safe distance from the section near the pleasure rides and amusement arcades to avoid conflict with others enjoying the beach, but there's plenty of space for everyone.

### Tentsmuir, Leuchars

Recommended large sandy beach within a nature reserve just north of St Andrews. Leaflet can be downloaded from [http://www.tentsmuir.org/Tentsmuir\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.tentsmuir.org/Tentsmuir_leaflet.pdf). Limited parking outside Kinshaldy Livery Yard from where you can hack to the beach, advised to telephone first to confirm availability.

### Pettycur Beach

A large beach with a vast expanse of flat sand at low tide stretching all the way from Kinghorn to Burntisland.

### St Andrews West Sands

One of Scotland's most popular and famous beaches this superb 2 mile stretch of sand close to St. Andrews town centre is where the opening sequence of Oscar winning Chariots of Fire was filmed. Facilities include a café and picnic area. Free parking on grass. This beach is well known as one of the best sites in Scotland for kite surfing, so not the place to take a nervous horse!

## Grampian

### Lunan Bay, Abroath

A beautiful broad east-facing sandy beach backed by dunes and framed by low cliffs to the north and south. From its northern end near Boddin Point, about three miles south of Montrose, it stretches for over two miles south to Ethie Haven. Car park behind the dunes.

## Highland (north)

### Torisdale Bay, Bettyhill

### Reiss Beach, near Wick, Sutherland

Miles of firm sand fantastic for riding, just north of Wick, accessible from both ends. Rarely busy other than at the southern end. The river which comes out half way along the beach from Westerloch can be deep in wet weather but at other times does not present any issue. There is ample free parking at the golf club OSGRND343555, from where it is possible to ride down the steps onto the beach, but to avoid any conflict with pedestrians, it's better to backtrack up the road towards Reiss Lodge, turn left and left again to get onto the beach slightly further south. There's also parking at Rough of Stain OSGRND343601.

### Dornoch Beach, Sutherland

Very popular with local riders, ample parking for lorries and trailers.

### Dunnet Bay, Castletown, Sutherland

A wonderful beach easily accessible from the main A836. If you park (free of charge) at the public car park/caravan site at the northern end towards Dunnet OSGRND219705, you can cross straight over the road after a gallop along the beach to ride along the horse trail around Dunnet Forest. Alternatively there is limited parking nearer Castletown in the public car park at OSGRND201682.

## Moray

### Roseisle Beach between Burghead and Findhorn

At low tide, this is a lovely long stretch of wide sand with views across the Moray Firth to the Black Isle and beyond. Ample parking at Roseisle Forestry Commission car park (OSGR NJ104657), from where a short stretch of track leads through the forest onto the beach. The Kimberley Inn at Findhorn is very



welcoming to horse and rider. Optional return route through the heathery sand dunes and forest but check tide times as the west section to/from Findhorn is very difficult at high tide.

## Orkney

Sanday Beach is one of many offering miles of sandy riding, great for a holiday!

If you need further advice on equestrian access in Scotland, contact your local BHS access representative (see [www.bhsscotland.org.uk](http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk) for contact details) or Helene Mauchlen, national manager for BHS Scotland Tel. 01764 656334 or email [Helene.Mauchlen@bhs.org.uk](mailto:Helene.Mauchlen@bhs.org.uk).

For guidance on equestrian access in England and Wales, contact Access and Rights of Way Department, The British Horse Society, Abbey Park, Stareton Lane, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2XZ. Telephone 02476 840581. Email [access@bhs.org.uk](mailto:access@bhs.org.uk).

**IMPORTANT** This guidance is general and does not aim to cover every variation in circumstances. The Society recommends seeking advice specific to a site where it is being relied upon.